

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 03028 061643Z

42

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00

CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 A-01 OPR-01 SY-05 USSS-00 OC-05

CCO-00 /059 W

----- 050993

O R 061547Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3250

DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEHBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USCINCEUR

USINT BAGHDAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3028

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PGOV LE

SUBJECT: RENEWAL OF TENSION IN SIDON AND ELSEWHERE IN LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 2894 AND PREVIOUS

1. TENSIONS GENERATED THROUGHOUT LEBANON OVER PAST
WEEK BY CLASHES BETWEEN LEBANESE ARMY AND "ARMED
ELEMENTS" INSIDON (REFTELS) HAD BEGUN TO LESSEN
PERCEPTIBLY LATE MAR 5, FOLLOWING COUNTRY-WIDE MANIFES-
TIONS BY CITIZENS (MOSTLY CHRISTIANS BUT SOME SHI'A)
DEMONSTRATING IN SUPPORT OF ARMY AND GOL. DEMONSTRATIONS
WENT OFF MORE OR LESS PEACEFULLY, WITH ONLY ONE PERSON
REPORTED KILLED (ACCIDENTALLY BY STRAY BULLET). COUNCIL
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03028 061643Z

OF MINISTERS MEETING EVENING MAR 5 RESULTED IN DECISION BY

SOLH CABINET (BACKED BY PRES FRANGIE) TO CONTINUE IN OFFICE, ALTHOUGH MIN OF WATER AND ELECTRICITY MALIK SALAM CARRIED OUT HIS THREAT TO RESIGN AND WALKED OUT OF MEETING. STAGE THUS SEEMED SET FOR FURTHER DIMINUTION OF TENSIONS AND PROGRESSIVE RETURN TO NORMALITY MAR 6, THANKS TO TYPICALLY LEBANESE SOLUTION IN WHICH NO PROBLEMS WERE REALLY SOLVED BUT WERE MERELY TO BE BRUSHED UNDER RUG FOR TIME BEING.

2. UNFORTUNATELY, WIDESPREAD APPREHENSION RE POSSIBLE ISRAELI RETALIATION AGAINST LEBA ON FOR LAST NIGHT'S TERRORIST OPERATIN IN TEL AVIV, FOLLOWED BY NEWS AT MID-DAY MAR 6 OF DEATH IN AUB HOSPITAL OF EX-DEPUTY MAAROUF SAAD (WHO HAD BEEN WOUNDED IN FEB 26 CLASHES IN SIDON (SEE BEIRUT 2611) HAVE CHANGED ALL THIS. PLO OFFICES IN BEIRUT APPARENTLY HAVE BEEN EVACUATED, AND FEDAYEEN ARE REPORTEDLY ON FULL ALERT IN AND AROUND COUNTRY'S 15 REFUGEE CAMPS, INCLUDING THOSE NORTH OF TRIPOLI WHERE TRIGGER-HAPPY ELEMENTS THIS MORNING ACTUALLY OPENED FIRE ON OVERFLYING LEBANESE AIR FORCE PLANES, PROBABLY ON ASSUMPTION THEY WERE ISRAELI. AS NEWS OF SAAD'S DEATH SPREAD DURING AFTERNOON, OTHER DISRUPTIVE INCIDENTS BEGAN OCCURRING AT VARIOUS POINTS IN BEIRUT, WHERE GROUPS OF HIS LEFTIST AND SUNNI MOSLEM SYMPATHIZERS (ACCOMPANIED IN SOME PLACES BY FEDAYEEN) HAVE TAKEN TO BLOCKING ROADS, BURNING TIRES, SHOOTING IN AIR, ETC. SIDON REPORTEDLY IS AGAIN GRIPPED BY TENSION, WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF "ARMED ELEMENTS" (I.E., FEDAYEEN AND THEIR LEFTIST ALLIES) HAVING REOCCUPIED STREET BARRICADES AND POSITIONS ON ROOFTOPS. LEBANESE ARMY AND INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES HAVE CANCELLED ALL LEAVES AND UNITS ARE CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN TRYING CLEAR CROWDS AND BARRICADES FROM SEVERAL ARTERIES IN BEIRUT, INCLUDING ROAD TO AIRPORT. MOST SHOPS AND BUSINESSES CLOSED EARLIER THAN USUAL, AND LATE AFTERNOON RUSH-HOUR TRAFFIC APPEARS LESS THAN NORMAL.

3. CONDITIONS DESCRIBED ABOVE HAVE CREATED PALPABLE ATMOSPHERE OF PUBLIC NERVOUSNESS AND FOREBODING. GENERAL FEELING SEEMS TO BE THAT FURTHER TROUBLE--
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 03028 061643Z

GENERATED INTERNALLY OR BY ISRAELIS, OR BOTH--IS STILL TO COME. I HAVE TAKEN PRECAUTION OF ADVISING EMBASSY'S AMERICAN STAFF TO AVOID UNNECESSARY MOVEMENT AT LEAST DURING NIGHT MAR 6-7.
HOUGHTON

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SITUATION, CIVIL DISORDERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: greeneet
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BEIRUT03028
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750078-1101
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750378/aaaacrsm.tel
Line Count: 112
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BEIRUT 2894
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30 JUL 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <26 NOV 2003 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RENEWAL OF TENSION IN SIDON AND ELSEWHERE IN LEBANON
TAGS: PINS, PGOV, LE
To: STATE DIA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006